

to promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which
here in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church;
provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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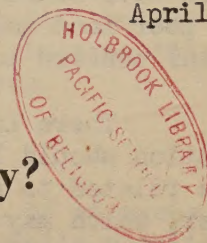
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Is the Rural Church Serving the Needs of the Community?

By David E. Lindstrom*



"Why should the church be concerned about rural community needs?" The answer seems obvious. The rural church is a part of the community; its members come from the community. They gain their livelihood there; their philosophy of life is developed there. They associate in work, play, and worship. They are part of a family group, and certainly the family should belong to a good church in the community. They belong to a neighborhood and, therefore, are in close contact with the neighbors roundabout. Their children attend school, they take part in school activities, and they are probably members of one or more organizations in the community outside the church. It is through these and other types of associations that the life philosophy and attitudes of individuals and families in the community are developed. Upon all these relationships the church must have a profound influence.

The church is the one institution which is responsible for setting the moral tone for community life. It is the church that should give people a sense of right and wrong in their relationships one with the other. True, much of that is done in the family, in the school, and in other ways. But the spiritual foundations for morality must come from the church. It should set the stage for a Christian cooperative spirit. That kind of spirit is needed in order to get things done by individuals and groups working together. Through a cooperative spirit, men work together for the love of getting the job done and for the sheer joy of working together, rather than for what they will receive.

What then are the needs of the community which are of special concern to the church? The welfare of the family is of primary concern, for the church must see life as a whole. While the church naturally cares as to whether men have enough to live on adequately, it must be equally concerned about the manner in which people gain their living.

* We are glad to present for this issue of The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin two significant statements on community life. The first is by Dr. David E. Lindstrom, Professor of Rural Sociology, University of Illinois, College of Agriculture, Urbana, Illinois. The second is by Dr. Robert F. Eshleman, Professor of Rural Sociology, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, Pa. Dr. Eshleman is a former student of Dr. Lindstrom's.

Soil is the basic resource for well-being in the rural community. The church should be interested in soil stewardship and should strive in every way to see that those who till the land leave it in better condition for their having worked it. Land is the very basis of life. The church is naturally concerned that those who need land may have access to it on reasonable terms. In some areas farms are becoming larger and larger, which makes it increasingly difficult for young people to become established on land of their own. In the interest of wholesome church, community, and family life, those who rent land should have reasonable assurance of continued occupancy. It has been well said that poor land makes poor people and poor people make poor churches. It is of special concern to the church that the economic base of the community be sound.

There is the problem of providing suitable universal education. Such education should lead from the kindergarten through the high school. It ought to be related to community needs rather than gauged alone in terms of subject matter, which may or may not be germane to the situation in which youth find themselves or are likely to find themselves when they grow up. These schools need to be financially supported so as to be able to furnish the children with a broad, modern educational program, for they will need this kind of training if they are to face life in our modern, complex world. The schools should be administered efficiently and staffed by rural-minded teachers, who have been so trained and have chosen rural teaching as a career. Certainly the church is interested in the quality of teachers and the quality of schools in the community.

Another need is adequate health protection and medical care. All studies reveal a serious lack of health facilities in the rural community. Since the body is the temple of the soul, the church should be interested in helping people keep healthy by adequate provision for public health services and a good system of health education. If the county health department is the way to provide this, the church should be interested in its impartial and efficient administration. To provide adequate health protection and medical care means also the provision of good hospital care. We are led to believe that hospital service ought to be within twenty-five miles of every farm family and that the hospital should have facilities that will meet every possible need. In addition, most smaller communities should have a health center for clinical care in case of emergency. More than that, each family needs to be assured of medical aid when needed, and such aid must be provided at moderate cost. The church should give some guidance as to whether that kind of medical care can best be provided under our present system of fees to private physicians, through group efforts, or whether in the end it must come to a tax-supported scheme.

A very important problem is the adequate development of constructive use of leisure time. The right and wholesome use of leisure means the strengthening of family life. An unwholesome use of leisure tends to destroy and break down the family, for it draws members off into various forms of commercialized recreation which are often noncreative. It means that opportunity should be given to those in our rural communities to take part in one-act plays or musical groups or other types of community entertainment. Here is a problem, finally, in creating wholesome social bonds, the kinds of friendships that will lead to an uplifting, rather than a degrading, type of life among the youth as well as the adults of the community.

Still another problem is that of assuring adequate care of the needy. Unemployment and disaster, sickness and illness, are likely to throw almost any

of our low or middle-class people on the relief roles. Those who can gain self-support should be insured help toward such support. Those who have no other means of support ought to be insured decent living conditions so that they can maintain a place in the community and not be set aside as another class of people.

Finally, there is the need for creating and nurturing a moral order and providing depth and direction. This should permeate all individual and group life. It should strive for a spirit of true brotherhood among the people and deepen respect for the divine nature of man; it should instill belief in a human destiny as part of God's plan. These, then, are a few concerns that the church ought to hold if it is to exert its full spiritual force.

Is the church helping to solve these needs?

1. Is the church facing the need for economic security? Yes, if it seeks to interpret the moral and spiritual unity of life, if it prevails upon its members to observe Christian principles in their everyday transactions and work toward an economic order that will assure basic living standards for all.
2. Is the church helping to solve the need for modern education? Yes, if it works for adequate and equal educational opportunities for all, if it co-operates in developing a constructive philosophy of education, and if it insists that knowledge should include all phases of man's life.
3. Is the church concerned about health protection and care? Yes, if it works for the adequate protection of health--for surroundings and facilities that will be conducive to good health for all.
4. Is the church working for constructive use of leisure time? Yes, if it co-operates in providing a wholesome environment and helps to develop constructive activities, such as music, drama, and art, so that people are less apt to pursue harmful amusements.
5. Is the church meeting the problem of the care of the needy? Yes, if through its members it maintains a sensitive concern for the plight of the distressed and takes a sympathetic interest in agencies for child welfare, homes for the aged, and appropriate help for the poor.

These are some of the ways in which the church can enter fully into the life of the community. Only by losing itself in such service and concern can the church fulfill its high purpose and become the trusted center of moral and spiritual influence in the community.

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What is a Christian Community?

By Robert F. Eshleman

As we explore the idea of community, we discover more than a group of people living within a given area. Community represents a "common unity" of people. It is a relationship that functions much like the family. Just as members of the family work for the interest of the whole family, so do families in the community work for the interest of the whole community. Where this pattern is consistent, it is adequate for world needs as well.

The bonds of interest within a given community may be largely economic, political, social, or religious. Likewise, there may be any combination of these. However, it should be understood that "common interest" in itself will not insure real community. How can we know that the fellowship will not be broken by selfish motives? The answer lies in "The Christian Community."

An early New Testament community of Christians was the one at Jerusalem led by the Apostles. We find there the answer to our question: What is a Christian community? "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." (Acts 4:32) These people were bearing witness to a Christian experience and to a new way of life, real and genuine. Here was a community marked by a common faith in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. So great was their faith that "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." We cannot have a Christian community without Christians.

Dr. W. W. Slabaugh believes that "the Christian community was more than a voluntary association of like-minded people. It was a group of redeemed people devoted to their Lord." "Of one heart and of one soul"--this is a Christian community. Its nucleus is found wherever two or three Christians gather.

There are two characteristics of the Christian community as envisioned among early Christians: (1) Every one according to his need. (Acts 4:35) At Jerusalem there were "none among them that lacked." Distribution was not according to each man's wants but was made "unto every man according as he had need." We may suppose that none kept to himself more than his minimum needs. (2) Every one according to his ability. (Acts 11:29) At Antioch prophets had come from Jerusalem seeking help. One of them, Agabus by name, stood up and told of the famine there. The Jerusalem community was in need of corn. The Christians at Antioch were able to give. The disciples, "every man according to his ability," determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea. We have here Christian individualism working at its best--every one giving according to his ability.

Every one according to his need and every one according to his ability is a formula which demands consideration by Christian people everywhere. It can give new direction wherever human values are involved. Every one will be supplied with basic minimum needs, physical and spiritual, because every one will be working and giving according to his ability--in work, in play, and in worship. It gives recognition not only to the leader but to every follower who also has something to give--be it only one talent. Likewise, it accommodates the ten-talent man. It is the spirit of Jesus Himself in the hearts of men who live at the crossroads of life.

The idea of Christian community has practical implications for the future of the church. Is it not the very environment in which the church finds expression? Is it not the church at work? Is it not the seedbed in which to sow the grain for tomorrow's harvest--a harvest which will yield a return in human values, in fellowship and forgiveness?

The Christian community will improve the quality of human relationship and make a significant contribution to our national welfare. We are living in an era when a certain amount of social planning seems to be essential. But many of our well-intended plans will be of limited value unless they can have rootage in communities that are Christian--where men will not seek the welfare of their own kith and kin only but the welfare of the whole community. This will lead to a stewardship in the use of human and natural resources both for this generation and for those which follow.